Modernisation of Armed Forces

2611. SHRIMATI AYANTI PATNAIK: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have a proposal to modernise the country's armed forces;

(b) if so, the steps taken on that direction during Eighth Five Year Plan;

(c) the fund earmarked thereon for the Ninth Five Year Plan; and

(d) the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE (SHRI N.V.N. SOMU): (a) The strengthening and modernisation of the defence forces is an ongoing process which engages the attention of the Government on a continuing basis.

(b) Steps have accordingly been taken for the modernisation and upgradations of the equipment and weaponry of the armed forces, during Eighth Five Year Plan.

(c) and (d) Action to prepare the estimates of funds, required during the Ninth Plan period has been initiated, in consultation with the Defence Services. Disclosure of details will not be in the national security interest.

Report of Arun Singh Committee on Defence expenditure

2612. SHRI AMAR SINGH: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) the salient features of Arun Singh Committee report on defence expenditure, especially the recommendation relating to the streamlining of defence procurements; and

(b) whether the recommendations are being strictly followed while procuring the defence equipment, and if not, reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE (SHRI N.V.N. SOMU): (a) and (b) A number of recommendations were made by the Committee on Defence Expenditure, headed by Shri Arun Singh, in a series of reports which the Committee iself classified as "Secret". Besides, the report also commented on same sensitive matters which were not included in its terms of reference. It is not desirable to disclose the details of the report, which are both secret and sensitive.

Shortage of spare for Bofors gun

2613. SHRI SATISH PRADHAN: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) the number of Bofors guns purchased;

(b) the provision for spares in the purchase agreement; and

(c) the number of Bofors guns not in use due to the shortage of spares?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE (SHRI N.V.N. SOMU): (a) to (c) A contract was concluded with Ms Bofors for procurement of 400 numbers of Guns, support vehicles, ammunition and 5 years' package of spares in 1986. 10 additional Guns were given by the supplier, free of cost. At any given time, a few Guns may be temporarily off the road for maintenance or repairs. This constitutes a small percentage and does not affect the efficiency of the Army

Augmenting air and surface defence

2614. SHRI SUSHILKUMAR SAMBHAJIRAO SHINDE: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Prime Minister, during the course of a day-long sea exercises, 'Jal-Avalokan' on board the VIRAAT, observed that while intrusion of Pakistan Aircraft did not by itself constitute a security threat to India, the continued induction of sophisticated arms in neighbouring countries and landing ot

arms, ammunition and explosives on the coastline, could not be overlooked; and

(b) if so, the steps are being taken to augment air and surface defences to match that of the neighbours?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE (SHRI N.V.N. SOMU): (a) and (b) Government is aware of acquisition of sophisticated arms by neighbouring countries, and of attempts to smuggle arms and explosives into India from across the borders and through our coastlines. A constant vigil is maintained along the land borders and coastlines to check attempts to smuggle arms and explosives into the country. All developments having a bearing on national security are regularly reviewed and monitored, and necessary measures are taken from time to time to maintain appropriate defence preparedness, including air and surface defence.

Decision on the recommendations of Singhdco Committee on Territorial Army

2615. SHRIMATI VEENA VERMA: SHRI RAJUBHAI A. PARMAR:

Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether decision have been taken to augment and assign a more effective role to Territorial Army, in the light of the recommendations of Shri K.P. Singhdeo Committee; and

(b) the steps taken or being taken in pursuance thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE (SHRI N.V.N. SOMU): (a) and (b) The Report of the Territorial Army Review Committee headed by Shri K.P. Singh Deo which was submitted to the Government in August, 1996 was circulated to the three Services Headquarters of the Armed Forces as well as to the Department of Personnel & Training with a view to eliciting their views on the various recommendations. The views of the Services Headquarters have been received recently. There are varying views expressed by the Services Headquarters on the recommendations contained in the Report which will necessitate further consultations. A final decision in the matter can be taken only after such consultations have been completed.

U.S. Military base in Indian Ocean

2616. SHRI AMAR SINGH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of reports regarding a new U.S. military base in Indian Ocean;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the reaction of Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI I.K. GUJRAL): (a) Yes, Sir. Government are aware of news-items that have reported on defence cooperation between the US and Sri Lanka, including reported plans for a US naval base facility in Sri Lanka.

(b) Government are aware that the US and Sri Lanka have an on-going programme of cooperation between the defence establishments of the two countries which includes courses in defence institutions, visits of experts and joint exercises on lines similar to what exists between the US and other countries in our region. There is, at present, no proposal for provision of nayal base facilities to the US by Sri Lanka.

(c) Government constantly monitor developments having implications for India's security and strategic interests and are committed to taking all steps necessary to counter any adverse impact in this regard.